

The Washington Bi.

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5 cents per copy.

VOL. VII.

WASHINGTON, D. C., SATURDAY, MARCH 9, 1889.

No. 41.

THE PRESS CONVENTION.

NEGRO LEADERSHIP—ADDRESS BY
MR. W. CALVIN CHASE—BEFORE
THE NATIONAL COLORED PRESS
CONVENTION MARCH 6TH.

The question of leadership is one which has perhaps taken up much time and space among press men as any one subject discussed by them. Its importance and popularity have grown out of the mysteries surrounding it as either its feasibility in importance. The question involves a few definitions and some wholesome history. It involves some interrogatories. What is leadership? In its broad sense it is morally the fact of leading, a process which may or may not be based in right or ability. In the sense in which the colored people would construe a leader, it is far more. Leadership from a colored man's standpoint means that there must be 1st, a principle, 2nd, a policy and 3rd, a following. As regards principle the leader must entertain a full and perfect conception of the place to which the Negro is entitled. He must be acquainted with the many sides of our political office. He must know its vulnerable points and must know the letter of the law as it relates to such principles. His policy must in the first place be sound. It must involve the interest of the whole class as against those of a minority. It must be representative in its character and the embodiment of the popular will. He must have a following, a real live legitimate following composing the majority of the people. This following must represent a common idea upon which a class can unite. The question of leadership is a broad one. Where does it begin and where end? Does it involve the political or the moral or the educational? Or does it take in everything? If this something means everything are these some things representative? Besides the relative position of the leader must be considered. Where must he reside? North, South, East or West? From what kind of a district must he hail? Must he be wealthy or poor? Must he be a man of the schools or must he be self-made? Must he be a democrat, republican or independent? Must he be an office seeker or a holder of office? Must he be a lawyer or doctor or divine? Or must he be a plain mechanic, or must he be a business man? Assuming what this leader ought to be, the question arises can such a leader be produced? Are we in need of a leader, assuming that he can be found? This will of course lead to a question of benefits and this very naturally as to whether we have ever had a leader or have we one now? Did he have a constituency? If so how did he get it and to what extent did he prove a benefit to said constituency? If he did not prove a benefit why? If he did, to what extent? And assuming that we had a leader, where is he now? What has he been doing during these past four dark and gloomy years? Has he held office during that period, or has he been log-rolling for himself during that time in order to get himself in shape in case of republican ascendancy?

This leader—What constitutional question has he mooted, what series of outrages has he opposed? What man or set of men has he assisted and to what extent has he proven his fidelity to his race or following as against a white man or set of men banded against him. Has he appealed to the people on the subject of cooperation? Has he defended the inalienable right of locomotion against which some of the southern states have legislated? Has he appealed to the popular will and conscience touching the discriminations and proscriptions which characterize public runs, public conveyances and public schools. Now I do not propose to attempt an answer to these inquiries. I simply desire to express my opinion that we have never had a leader in the proper sense, that we have none at this time and that to insist upon leadership as defined and insisted upon by many of the members of the press. True we have had scores of men who have done service in the upbuilding of the race and who are now assiduously pursuing the same course but these men made no pretensions to leadership nor were they leaders by virtue of the choice of the popular judgment. Where there have been

these pretensions are cases in which there was no claim to the title but a cold unwarrantable assumption based in self-conceit and prosecuted in sinister motives.

The idea of self constituted leadership is one which seems to be taking a most dangerous hold on the minds of some of our prominent colored men. They seem to be spurring about in a most fitful manner now at this and then at that attempt at political diplomacy. Today they are on the rostrum in defense of those high principles which lie at the bottom of the republican party, civil and political equality of rights—tomorrow they assume a middle ground and the next day they contend that it is the duty of the colored people to ignore both their former positions and to adopt one which is antagonistic to them; to become a balance of power—a corporate body to be bought and sold, pliable to the fluctuations common to all marketable commodities. And if positive alliance become necessary they would have the negro join the democratic party, that historic enemy of liberty and good government, and to abide our time among them. They have been drifting between todayism and independence without any apparent aim or end except their own personal aggrandizement. They were forgetful of the fact that the colored man has a history unwritten though it be upon which to claim equal and exact justice; that it became necessary to repeat some portions of it in order that the whites may know that it is not forgotten by us; that the negro has for centuries borne the heat and burden of the day; been toiling incessantly and without compensation to furnish proofs of the stability of the American institution; that they have by their labor caused the South to bloom with the rich products of husbandry, and the North to ring with the noisy hum of prosperity; that in all the wars in which this country has been engaged, the colored man was found battling for an independence which he did not feel and for the security of liberties which were denied him; that the colored man has always been true to his tasks—a life of self sacrifice and devotion to friends and duty.

This class of some individuals are constantly insisting upon their greatness when they do not possess even the elements calculated to form the basis of ordinary manhood. These would-be great people are constantly in the way. When those who possess proper elements are marching forward unostentatiously and attacking the strongholds of error, these would-be great people are tugging at their heels in order that they may also appear great, or are snapping and growling and snarling because they cannot take the lead. If a convention is to meet and they are not named among the great lights, there to display their whiskers, their grey hair, bald heads or long ears, these pigmies set up a howl and make the air lurid with denunciations and promiscuous sulphurous vaporings. They fairly froth at the mouth and declare that the world is all upside down and themselves alone on top instead of the bottom. This class are brawling and sore heads and can be of no permanent good to the race. This question of leadership is purely a question as to position in line. If the truly great are now in the rear, it won't be long before they will be called to the front. The brave private will always supersede the cowardly captain if he will only wait long enough to give the captain time to show his inability and the deed will justify the theme that in union there can be nothing but retrogression, broken vows or broken bones. The causes of our present position are well known. The means calculated to modify or elevate that condition are not obscure or occult that a phenomenal personage is necessary to delve into the hidden mysteries of development. The remedy is plain and the only quest is will we appreciate and act accordingly? For upwards of two hundred years the colored people have been made the objects of the most bitter hatred and tyranny. No task was too laborious, no tendency was too humiliating for the slave. A life of unequalled toil lay before him, a past black with the shameless atrocities of a hard and wicked master. Everything essential to the make up of a proper

manhood or womanhood was denied the slave, and the influence which conspire to destroy individuality were fostered by the whites then beset with their awful consequences among them. Whether the last traces of African individuality was destroyed in the vortex of conspiring tendencies it is difficult to say. Surely when the Negro emerged from slavery he brought but little sin in common save the stripes of brutality together with ignorance and poverty. Such a condition was the logical consequence of slavery—a life of intense misery and deprivation; a standing monument to the cupidity and tyrannical spirit of past times. To day we are in a condition to appreciate the forces which have operated against the liberty and equality of our people. By the few lessons we have learned while in the enjoyment of a new estate, we can form some conception of the possibilities which lie before us and the only means by which they may be realized.

We occupy a peculiar place in the busy American body politic. We are included in the basis of representation; we are taxed and made to conform to all the rules and regulations governing society, but we have no real representative force and practically nothing to say with regard to taxation. Our votes are not counted and our lives and property are subject to the fiendish caprice of lawlessness and crime. The prejudice which operate against us are fed by a vicious sentiment which favors non interference with state sovereignty even when the assertion of such presumed sovereignty overrides the power and authority of the federal government—a sentiment which permits state authority to interfere in federal as well as in state elections. The propagand of this sentiment has been the result of the inadequacy of the administrative policies of presidents. They have been too cowardly, too pondering and regardless of the rights and liberties of the people as a whole.

The disposition on the part of the whites of the north to absolutely ignore the national and constitutional rights of the colored people in that section is producing an alarming effect upon the people throughout the north. The absence of republican forms of government in those states where the colored people are in the majority is stimulating inquiry into the causes which have brought it about. At the north a condition of things cannot be readily coerced under which a state may exist intact while violating the essential principles upon which a state should act. There, obedience to the popular will results as a matter of course from the very theme of government, the wisdom of which is confirmed by practice and endorsed by the most enlightened states. Under it the states at the north have grown and prospered, law reigns and peace is queen; the dignity of labor is conceded and the component parts of the body politic are kept in motion and harmony by a fixed sentiment in favor of the will of the majority. At the south it is different. The government of the state rests upon the theory that the majority of a certain class of citizens constitutes the popular will. Now, instead of insisting upon some mysterious leadership, some unaccountable panacea for the evils which we now suffer, why not look at the history of the development of peoples and from examples of progress and means advancement found there select the means of our own development?

Why expect any one man or set of men to point out the way when that way is open to the intelligent of our people and open the history of human progress? In this light I regard the propriety of turning our attention to industrial pursuits cannot be over estimated. It is the absence of wealth, the want of acquaintance with the diversified industries of this country, our failure to appreciate the true relations of capital to labor and our inability to cope successfully with our white brothers in skilled labor which is one of the secrets of our failure to secure full social and political recognition. The ballot of the freed man is excepted to not because it is not the legitimate incident to citizenship—it is the very characteristic of citizenship—but because it does not represent a sufficient property of material interest to command respect. And whether

this exception to our suffrage is right or not, or even expedient is not a question with us inasmuch as it is the disposition of the dominant race to insist that our suffrage shall represent some permanent and common interest. The theory and practice of taxation without representation is wrong in principle and should not be tolerated, but the theory of representation without the subject of taxation might be equally objectionable. Disguise it as we may the fact remains that we may not hope to be recognized as equals in the vast and busy American body politic until we accumulate wealth or at least evince that interest in the material development of our people and a warm solicitude for the adoption of such mediums as through which labor may secure happiness and prosperity.

It is the duty of the colored people to turn their attention toward material development, to let politics be the incident to and not the object of their citizenship and when called upon to exercise their suffrage to do so with special reference to sound moral principles and on the side of material advancement. Of course this involves popular education as a means of appreciation and prosecuting schemes and systems by which the accumulation of wealth is made possible. It also involves whole cooperation as a means of welding individual powers into one grand and profitable force. This question of material prosperity also involve the sources of waste question relating to the bung-hole and the spigot. It involves temperance which is now becoming a matter of double importance. Hitherto the question has assumed no greater importance than to call forth sentimental ebullition. The object to the consumption of liquor has been laid in moral considerations merely and has been urged by moralists and divines. But to be fully considered this question must address itself to the economical interest of men as well as to considerations of mere morality. It must be made perfectly plain that the consumption of liquor will increase the taxes and endanger the material prosperity of the people. In short it must be considered with reference to the economic policy of the country. The expense of intemperance, as well as its horrors are being felt and the pauperization of our working classes and the crime and misery which are its natural consequences; are warnings which the press cannot pass unheeded.

Our condition demands not so much a leader as it does a more widespread manifestation of moral heroism and physical courage. It demands that a manly defense be made against the encroachments of unauthorized power, greed and vice. It demands that when our homes are invaded the shot gun shall be the direct resort in their protection; when our rights are invaded the navy-six shall play as important part in their just arbitration as it does in their denial; that when our property is destroyed that the torch of retaliation shall be lighted and applied until, devastation, destruction, blood, tears, misery and starvation shall teach our white oppressors that the colored man whose heaven erected face the smiles of love adorn can and will fight and die as will a submit and suffer and is being taught to assert his rights by the derful instruments of revenge. Our condition suggests the further adherence to the republican party as a lever toward our elevation. The colored man finds the republican party still holding out its arms to embrace him as a man and a brother. Its principles and its practices proclaim and execute in so far as it is possible, the theory of the equality of citizenship. It builds our school houses, it stimulates in us a desire to develop all the noble instincts of our nature. Wherever it maintains power, the colored man is protected against insult in a moral sense as well as against the encroachments which his enemies are endeavoring to practice in a political way. That party favors the purification of politics, a reform of the civil service, a system of protection to American industries and American labor. It declares opposition to Bourbonism and its nefarious practices for the defeat of honest elections. It is opposed to Mormonism—the foulest social

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